

RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

THE BRITISH REACTION

British policy, as pointed out earlier, was dedicated to the evacuation of foreign troops from Iran and to the preservation of Iranian independence. Failing to achieve this ideal, the British were ready to compromise with the Russians, provided Soviet influence did not overrun the boundaries of the northern zone, as Mr. Bevin's suggestions during the Moscow conference indicated. But the extension of Soviet power into the government itself and into the south was a point on which the British were adamant. Such an extension was almost a *casus belli* for Great Britain and called for vigorous action. Early in 1946 reports reached Teheran that the British protege, Sheikh Khazal of Mohammera, who had lived in exile in Iraq, had gathered a force of Arab warriors and raided Khuzistan. This appeared to be a British-sponsored separatist movement in the south which could be interpreted as a countermove to the separatism incited by the Soviets in the north. Moreover, the day after the announcement of the new cabinet in Teheran, British troops were ordered from India to Basra on adjoining Iraqi territory. The next day, to avoid any legal complications, the Iraqi government made a statement approving this landing as in accord with the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930.

Simultaneously several tribal chieftains in the south announced that they were very critical of the Tudeh and its increased influence. A few days later the Iraqi Independence party demanded the return of Khuzistan to Iraq, arguing that the province, inhabited mainly by Arabs, should return to an Arab country. In turn a news dispatch

from Bagdad said that one of the leading chieftains of Khuzistan, Sheikh Abdullah, had arrived in the Iraqi capital en route to Cairo to protest to the Arab League against the mistreatment of Arabs by the Iranian government.

The situation grew tense. Qavam protested to the British government against the landing of troops in Basra, basing his statements on the announcement of the government of India that the troops might be used for the protection of British interests in Iran. While the British Foreign Office denied that such was the intention, it made clear, nevertheless, in a statement of August 6 that the troops had